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Prints are fallible

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As a former police officer who once believed that fingerprints were infallible, I congratulate you on your editorial and related articles on the subject (17 September, p 3 and 6).

While a great deal of valid criticism has been directed at fingerprinting and doubts have been expressed over whether it can legitimately be called a forensic science, it would be, as your editorial points out, "a dreadful waste of a powerful tool" if such evidence was rejected.

My daughter Shirley, herself a police officer, was wrongly accused of leaving her fingerprint at a murder scene in 1997. After a long campaign, it has been officially accepted that the print was not hers, and a man convicted of the murder on flawed fingerprint evidence was freed.

Despite all this, I remain a firm supporter of fingerprinting as a major crime prevention, detection and identification tool. But its mantle of infallibility must be removed. Experts must embrace the legitimate challenge to their science and, as criminologist Simon Cole points out in your article, there must be much more clarity about error rates. The results of research by Itiel Dror, also featured in your piece, showing that a range of factors can bias experts' judgement must be followed up if public faith in fingerprinting is to be restored.

My experience over the past nine years has convinced me that the vast majority of fingerprint experts are people of high integrity and skill, and I have them to thank for my daughter's freedom. Unfortunately, the UK fingerprint establishment has ignored legitimate challenges and recommendations for change.

There are a number of internet sites for those interested in following the ongoing fingerprint debate: clpex.com, onin.com and shirleymckie.com.

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